

peasant out of Balzac, yet keep their feeling
for the saving
grace of life.

Who was he? His father had returned, he
tells us, to the
Greek mainland from the colony of Cyme in
Aeolis on
the coast of Asia Minor, a fugitive 'from
bitter beggary.'
For few Greeks shared Langland's faith in the
blessings of
poverty, though Hesiod knows it has its
compensations
also—that 'the half may be more than the
whole' and
contentment can sweeten the poor man's
meal of* mallow
and asphodel'. But he grumbles grimly
enough at his
father's choice of a new home, Ascra under
Helicon, 'a
miserable village, bad in winter, wretched in
summer,
never good*. Then his father died and his
good-for-
nothing brother Perses, by bribing those
'gift-devouring
kings', the local chieftains, cheated him in
the division of
their inheritance. However, as our proverb
says, losers
have leave to chide'. Hesiod makes the most
of it and
addresses to 'foolish Perses' this poem, the
Works and
Days: which first reproaches him with his
injustice; next
passes to the general theme of human
wickedness; then
describes the Work his feckless brother
must do not to
starve on his ill-gotten land (with an
excursus on naviga-
tion), and the lucky and unlucky Days he
must observe.
The poem is thus a Treatise on Morals, a
Farmer's Friend,
a Mariner's Guide, and an Old Moore's
Almanac in one.
'Foolish Perses' himself serves as a peg on

which to hang
this omnibus volume. He may indeed be a
mere figure of
fiction; but I see no reason to assume it.
Some of the
autobiographical matter, about the origin of
the poet's
father, sounds true enough; the rest quite
well may be.

This work, then, of probably the ninth
century B.C. is
no more than *Piers Plowman* 'Art for Art's
sake'* Only it
is blessed with that golden heirloom, the
Homeric hexa-
meter, as against Langland's wooden
alliteration; and its